

To: Watershed Management Area #4 (Lower Passaic River)[wma_4@list.wpunj.edu]
From: DAVID YENNIOR
Sent: Tue 4/16/2013 8:50:41 AM
Subject: Fwd: Star Ledger: Five reasons to clean up the Passaic River

Here's a more positive article by Linda Ocasio about plans to revitalize the Passaic River waterfront in Newark with two public parks that have been too long in coming.

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From: "Kluesner, Dave" <kluesner.dave@epa.gov>
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http://blog.nj.com/njv_editorial_page/2013/04/five_reasons_to_clean_up_the_p.html

Five reasons to clean up the Passaic River



By [Linda Ocasio/The Star-Ledger](#) The Star-Ledger
on April 14, 2013 at 7:00 AM, updated April 14, 2013 at 7:01 AM

Joseph Nardone carries his camera down to the water's edge of the Passaic River to take pictures for the latest installment of Riverfront Park currently under construction. The new seven acre addition is part of the city's continuing plan to beautify the area along the Passaic River. Robert Sciarrino/The Star-Ledger

To most people, the Passaic River is a filthy backwater, a casualty of the industrial revolution, hopelessly lost.

But not for a band of hardy activists who have been working for years to bring it back, and to reinvigorate the neighborhoods the river winds through on its way to Newark Bay.

They see a boardwalk, restaurants, playgrounds, tennis courts, even boat launches and an outdoor stage for summer concerts. After years of fighting, they have a toehold already — in the Essex County Riverfront Park, which is opening in segments and will eventually include a 1,000-foot-

long orange boardwalk built from recycled plastic. If they get their way, it'll blossom into something more.

All this hinges on cleaning up the river. This lower stretch of the Passaic is a Superfund site, so despoiled by industrial wastes the federal government is monitoring the cleanup. But to these urban pioneers — Damon Rich, Scott Dvorak, Joseph Della Fave and Nancy Zak — it's all within reach.

Dvorak, a program director with the Trust for Public Land, organized the walking tour on a cold March day. The trust has partnered with Newark to develop Riverfront Park. Rich, Newark's waterfront planner, is getting ready to launch another season of \$5 boat rides on the Passaic to introduce Newarkers and others to the river. Della Fave and Zak, the executive director and community outreach coordinator, respectively, of the Ironbound Community Corporation, fought hard for years to preserve and clean Riverbank Park in the Ironbound, a 100-year-old-park that eventually will be connected to the newer park.

Listen to them talk and you can imagine the river coming to life. Once that happens, it is an idea hard to shake. Here are five good reasons to let your imagination run wild on the river.

— *Linda Ocasio*

1. Saving the food chain

Big fish eat little fish. That is a fact of life — and why cleaning the Passaic is so important. Ray Basso, senior policy adviser with the federal Environmental Protection Agency, explains that long ago there was a navigation channel in the river, but once industry declined, it fell into disuse. The river not only covered over the channel but buried dioxin deep in the river bed.

The top 6 inches of the deep-buried sediment is the bioactive zone. "That's where the connection is between sediment contamination and the food chain," Basso said. Worms feed on it and are in turn eaten by small fish. One fish can eat a lot of worms, and dioxins ingested adhere to the fatty tissue of the fish. Bigger fish dine on their smaller brethren. If the angler who drops his line in the Passaic catches said fish, if he is smart, he'll toss that fish right back in the water or risk exposing himself to PCBs and dioxins. The fish won't have three eyes or two heads. It will look fine. But it's not. It may take decades of cleanup for us to eat Passaic fish safely.

2. Economic revitalization

Who can doubt that a cleaner Passaic will draw people and businesses to the waterfront? If you've dined or shopped along the Hudson or the Delaware, you've seen the throngs of people in towns such as Cold Spring and Lambertville.

If a town is lucky, it gets a business owner like Ruth Jones. "Have you heard about our river cleanups?" That is the first thing Jones, the owner of Kittatinny Canoes on the Delaware, wants

you to know. This will be the 24th year of the annual cleanup on a 70-mile stretch of the river. Her parents started the canoe rental in 1941. "We saw the river getting more and more trashed, and in 1990 we started to clean up," she said.

Volunteers come from all over the country. Now, "it's so sparkling clean, it's beautiful," she said. And it's not just about business. "I was an only child and I played on the river when I was young, and I still play on it," Jones said. "I'm always paddling on the river, and I'm going to paddle till I kick the bucket. The river is my playground, playmate and best friend."

3. Recreational opportunities

Damon Rich, the city's waterfront planner, had a small booklet that he circulated among the river walkers: a 1924 report by Essex County calling for a plan to connect residents of Newark and other cities to the river in their own backyard. This does not discourage anyone. The Ironbound, in addition to having very little parkland, has among the highest asthma rates in the state.

Lito Miranda, who lives in the Ironbound, said he'd like to see football fields augment the meager facilities of Newark's high schools. Rhonda lives in public housing with her four sons, a stone's throw from the Passaic. Her sons have asthma, she said. Although she wouldn't give her last name while touring the Passaic riverbank, she was quick to describe what she would like to see: "Paddle boats, like they have in Verona Park, some fishing that you could throw back in, a little concert stage — something like that, kids would enjoy."

4. Ecosystem restoration that will help control flooding

Tim Kubiak, assistant supervisor for environmental contaminants at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said the post-Hurricane Sandy discussion about flood solutions such as restoring wetlands (that absorb water), growing oyster and clam reefs (to prevent surges), and softening shorelines can't happen along the polluted Passaic. A superficial cleanup would make matters only worse. The EPA has proposed a riverbank-to-riverbank cleanup; some of the corporations that will foot the bill want to target hot spots further north of the worse pollution in the lower Passaic. "What we don't want is something that looks green but perpetuates the injury," Kubiak said.

The lower Passaic was rich with oyster beds in the 1800s. "Oysters are so sensitive to toxins, in terms of reproduction," Kubiak said. "You want, over time, to get oysters to reproduce and be self-sustaining again." You're not getting 100 percent of bad sediment out of a river, he added, but it has to be enough to be a major improvement. "We're trying to make the public whole, so we have to follow a planned-out process. We don't want to get ahead of remediation."

5. Environmental justice

Corporations profited from the Passaic River for generations. It's time for residents to reclaim what is theirs. Many of the most polluted areas in the United States abut working-class

neighborhoods similar to the Ironbound. The Trust for Public Land notes there is less than a half-acre of parkland per 1,000 residents in the neighborhood. For generations, residents have been deprived of this resource — a clean and accessible waterfront.

On the last leg of the river tour, the river walkers stop in their tracks and there is a collective gasp. There are the first orange planks of a boardwalk. There is a berm that will soon sprout grass and flowers. And there is a platform that will eventually be a “performance pavilion,” as the trust calls it. On the water is a floating boat dock. Most important, there is an unrestricted view of the river and the Newark skyline. People hang on the railing and linger, the way people do anywhere in the world where there is a river — and where planners gave people a place to walk.

Joseph Nardone, the official historian and photographer for the Ironbound Community Corp.’s riverfront support group, wasn’t the only one taking pictures. Everyone is aiming a cellphone camera at the view. “This is turning out much better than I could have imagined,” he said.

For information about public and private efforts to revitalize the Newark riverfront, click [here](#).

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